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SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF FAO: STEADY BUT MEASURED PROGRESS

REF: (A) 04 ROME 4624, (B) 04 ROME 4297,
(C) ROME 0239, (D) ROME 0327
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Sensitive but unclassified - please handle accordingly.

1. (U) Summary: In its February and March meetings, the Interessional Working Group (ISWG) on the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO took significant steps to move the IEE process forward: (1) designation of a regionally balanced Bureau with a U.S. vice chair, (2) agreement on criteria and procedures for selection and hiring of experts to assist the ISWG, (3) concurrence on the purpose, scope and coverage of a 2-day ISWG seminar designed to give the experts clear guidance so that they can begin work on an IEE approach paper and a first draft of the IEE terms of reference (TOR), and (4) agreement on a notional timetable of meetings through mid May. Progress has been slower than U.S. and other major donors had hoped, and the likelihood that the ISWG will accomplish its mandate in time for the June 2005 FAO Council is diminishing; but key USG objectives for the IEE process are being met, and the more measured pace has helped keep G-77 members on board. Contributions and pledges to the ISWG Trust Fund thus far amount to almost \$88,500 from three donors, with several other countries poised to contribute. Planned ISWG expenditures through May are estimated at \$137,700. End summary.

BACKGROUND

2. (U) In November 2004, the FAO Council agreed to begin work on an IEE of FAO -- the first truly independent evaluation with such scope and with such broad member buy-in of any major UN organization. The Council created an ISWG to draft TOR for the IEE and to present proposals for the management of the IEE process, preferably by the next Council meeting (June 2005), but no later than the November 2005 Council. Ref C reports on the first ISWG meeting, held on 14 January, and ref D recaps discussion of the IEE by the Geneva Group (top donors) on 28 January. The ISWG met again on 21 February and 23 March, and made significant progress in organizing its own work, in setting criteria for experts, in establishing a mechanism (viz., an expert-facilitated ISWG seminar) to translate the expressed wishes and desires of FAO members into draft TOR, and in setting a timetable.

ISWG BUREAU AND ISWG WORKING PROCEDURES

3. (U) On 21 February, ISWG members agreed that the ISWG's work would be facilitated by a Bureau, which would consist of the ISWG Chair (Ambassador Flavio Perri, Permanent Representative of Brazil), and one representative from each of the seven regional groups. Designated Bureau members are Afghanistan, Australia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Netherlands, Pakistan, and the U.S. Other members are free to attend Bureau meetings as observers, and several have done so. U.S. Alternate Permrep Willem Brakel was designated ISWG Vice Chair, ad personam. It was agreed tacitly that the working language of the Bureau would be English.

4. (SBU) The Bureau met several times between the February and March ISWG meetings, and proved to be an effective mechanism to move the IEE forward. Chairman Perri kept a firm controlling hand on the Bureau's deliberations. This slowed down some steps; but also had a positive effect: after Perri had been convinced on any given point by the more proactive OECD Bureau members, he was able to bring the more cautious and skeptical G-77 members along. The U.S. vice-chairmanship has given the Bureau leadership a desirable North-South balance, and has complemented Perri's blustery, broad-brush tendencies with a more practical and detail-oriented approach. The OECD members of the Bureau have worked together smoothly,

thanks in part to timely "Geneva Group" meetings hosted by the U.S. Mission.

15. (SBU) Perri has readily turned to John Markie, Chief of the FAO Evaluation Service (PBEE), as an advisor on technical and logistical issues, as the first drafter of Bureau and ISWG minutes, and as the repository of ISWG documents. This close cooperation with the Secretariat rightly raised some eyebrows, but the members who are

most concerned about the independence of the IEE (including the U.S.) have ensured that PBEE's role is strictly a technical and supporting function, and that it is the member governments who call the shots on all matters of policy and substance. (It should be recognized, too, that the FAO Secretariat is an important stakeholder in the IEE, and should consider itself so, in order to increase the organizations buy-in to top IEE results and recommendations.)

WORKING METHODS OF THE BUREAU AND THE ISWG

16. (SBU) The Bureau was conceived as a clearing house to facilitate the work of the ISWG, but with all policy decisions to be referred to the full ISWG membership. Yet, given the relative efficiency of the Bureau mechanism and the good and improving chemistry among its members, there has been some tendency for the Bureau to begin to lead, rather than follow, the ISWG. This process has served the OECD countries (whose Bureau representatives coordinate smoothly and closely with their regional group constituents) very well. It has been more problematical for the African, Asian and Latin American Bureau members, who have more difficulty communicating and coordinating with their constituents, and who therefore risk getting ahead of them.

17. (SBU) ISWG meetings themselves, attended by 30-40 members, have proved to be cumbersome and time-consuming. Even a largely pre-cooked discussion based on texts previously agreed in the Bureau can take many hours to approve. This is a particular concern since the ISWG requires simultaneous translation in four languages, costing nearly \$15,000 per day. At times, Chairman Perri seems in little hurry to move discussions forward to conclusion, but he makes skillful use of side-discussions during coffee and lunch breaks to cobble together solutions to potentially contentious issues. At the end of the day, consensus is achieved, and political legitimacy established.

EXPERT SUPPORT

18. (U) From the inception of the ISWG, it was recognized that member governments would need independent expert advice to carry the IEE forward. This idea was fleshed out in separate but complementary papers circulated in January by the European and North American regional groups. The Bureau shaped the concept into a paper on "Expert Support to the ISWG" that was presented for approval at the 23 March meeting. Key features include:

-- Some experts (Category A) will be invited to provide specialized inputs at the ISWG preparatory seminar (see para. 10-12), including the Director General and his representatives; staff members of other agencies to share experience of evaluations of multilateral institutions; external experts on evaluation methodology and good practice; and external experts and stakeholders to give outside perspectives on the work of FAO and their expectations of the evaluation.

-- A Panel of Experts (Category B experts) will be established to assist the ISWG in preparing the TOR for the IEE. The panel will identify critical issues; provide inputs to the ISWG seminar; participate in and assist the deliberations of the ISWG; draft and present an approach paper on the scope, coverage and focus of the evaluation; and present draft TOR.

-- In the Panel of Experts as a whole, the following competencies and skills will be sought: experience of complex evaluations, knowledge of evaluation methodology, knowledge of the UN and international system, knowledge of FAO's field of work, experience of working in/with developing countries, communication skills and linguistic ability, and internationally recognized achievements.

-- Experts will be employed under applicable FAO rules, and remuneration for Category B experts will be \$600 per day (the going rate for consultants of the desired caliber) for an estimated 22 days.

-- The selection process will include the following

steps: (1) nominations sent to the ISWG Bureau by the regional group coordinators, (2) the Bureau assesses,

rates and shortlists the candidates, (3) the ISWG selects the Expert Panel, and (4) the experts are appointed by the Chief of PBEE in his capacity as budget holder of the IEE trust fund.

19. (SBU) The ISWG in March eventually agreed to all the main points above, but lengthy discussions revealed a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of some G-77 members about the nature of the Category B experts sought. These members had come to see the experts as somehow representing or speaking for the interests of their respective regions, and they therefore wanted as many experts as possible (ideally for them, one per region). Concerned that some regions might not be able to find suitable experts, these G-77 members also pressed the Chairman repeatedly to postpone the nomination deadline. USdel made a forceful argument that, if the experts are qualified, their region of origin is immaterial, and that hiring more than 2-3 experts would be impractical and prohibitively expensive. Moreover, we noted, if the nomination process lagged the ISWG would be unable to complete its work by the June 2005 FAO Council. The discussion seemed to achieve an important clarification for the G-77 reps present. Nevertheless, Chairman Perri ended up moving back the deadline, settling on 20 April. When it was ascertained that this last deadline was firm, OECD reps reluctantly acquiesced, recognizing that some delays might be necessary to give the G-77 a sense of comfort with the process.

ISWG SEMINAR

10. (U) For the 23 March ISWG, the Bureau also prepared a paper outlining the purpose, scope, and coverage of the proposed ISWG seminar. In the Bureau's proposal, the seminar:

- "should be designed to result in clear and agreed guidance for the consultant experts from the ISWG, giving them sufficient information to prepare an approach paper for ISWG decision on the basis of which IEE TOR will be drafted,"

- would "identify and clarify issues and questions on (a) the purpose, focus and coverage of the evaluation, and (b) the methodology of the evaluation," and

- would include four sections: (a) information from stakeholders on vision for FAO and perceived issues to be examined through an evaluation, (b) briefings by invitees on evaluation experiences, (c) briefings by regional groups on their expectations from and issues for an evaluation, and (d) discussion between the ISWG and Panel of Experts on issues and lessons for evaluation approach and methodology.

11. (SBU) The nature of the seminar was the subject of much discussion at ISWG and Bureau meetings in February-March. The final Bureau paper captured the idea, first proposed in the U.S.-drafted North America group paper, that the seminar should be tightly focused and aimed at producing a concrete outcome. Gaining broad acceptance of this concept required long, patient explanation by the U.S. and other like-minded countries. African delegates, in particular, argued for more time and for more seminars that would educate ISWG members in depth on the role and work of FAO.

12. (SBU) To streamline the process of getting from the ISWG to a first draft of the TOR, the U.S., Canada and Australia initially proposed that the Panel of Experts attending and facilitating discussions at the ISWG seminar would take on board the comments of all members, and turn these directly into draft TOR. European delegates argued for interposing another step: immediately after the ISWG seminar, the hired experts would draft an approach paper that would outline in broad terms the purpose, coverage and scope of the IEE. The approach paper would then be taken back to the ISWG for its approval at a subsequent meeting, and thereafter the drafting of the TOR would become a relatively straightforward technical exercise. The Europeans argued persuasively that a scenario that includes an approach paper, while introducing an extra step, would in the long run save time and help maintain consensus. The ISWG agreed, and adopted this idea on 23 March.

TIMETABLE

13. (U) The ISWG also agreed on the following notional timetable for the near term:

20 Apr deadline for nominations of experts

04 May ISWG meeting to confirm selection of the
Panel of Experts and seminar speakers

17-18 May Seminar

14. (U) This schedule allows for about one month after the seminar until the next FAO Council meeting (20-25 June). That an approach paper can be written/approved and IEE TOR drafted in that time is increasingly unlikely. The U.S. and other like-minded countries have repeatedly and strongly urged that the ISWG continue to strive to meet the June 2005 target, if possible.

FUNDING THE IEE

15. (U) Thus far, voluntary contributions and formal pledges to the IEE process (from Switzerland, U.S. and New Zealand) have totaled \$88,489. As of the end of March, about \$57,000 has been spent. Estimated future expenditures in the near term, including the 4 May meeting of the ISWG, the hiring of 3 experts, and the seminar, come to about \$138,000. Taking into account existing donor contributions and commitments, another \$106,000 is urgently needed to continue the ISWG's work.

16. (SBU) The USG demarche to potential donor capitals (ref E) has helped mobilize support for the IEE. A letter to all FAO members from Aziz Mekouar, Independent Chair of the FAO Council, which went out in late March, also helped generate interest. U.S. Mission has learned that the following countries are poised to make pledges or contributions to the IEE startup in the near term: Canada, Finland, UK, and possibly Sweden. Many of these contributions would be on the order of the U.S. \$25,000 startup pledge. Other potential donors say they are likely to contribute, but may not make a final decision for several months (Italy), or plan to wait and see that the TOR are satisfactory before making a commitment (Germany, Belgium). Still others are still considering whether or when to contribute (Netherlands, Spain).

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Progress on the IEE has been significant, and it has been particularly noteworthy that consensus has been maintained among the entire ISWG membership. Maintaining broad buy-in and support has required steady, patient, persuasive diplomacy. We have sought to push the process as much as we can, but recognize that too much pressure could be counterproductive. Although the tone and spirit in the Bureau and the ISWG have remained cooperative and positive, it is clear that some members, particularly among African and some other Q delegations, continue to feel somewhat threatened by the complexity of the IEE. Therefore, although the pace of progress has been somewhat slower than we had hoped, the added time has allowed us to retain and build support for the IEE. Such buy-in is essential if the IEE is to be completed and its recommendations accepted and adopted.

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